

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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R 251012Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9474
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 3340

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT ELAB BG
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE THIRD WEEK:
DISRUPTION OF OSMANI'S MEETINGS

REF: DACCA 3146

SUMMARY. PRESIDENT ZIA IN HIS CAMPAIGN SPEECHES HAS SHIFTED TO A MORE STATESMANLIKE APPROACH. ON THE OTHER HAND, GENERAL OSMANI HAS BEGUN TO RETURN ZIA'S EARLIER RHETORIC, CHARGING THAT ZIA HAS COLLABORATED WITH UNPATRIOTIC ELEMENTS (THE MUSLIM LEAGUE) WHICH ARE INTENT ON CAUSING COMMUNAL TROUBLE (ALTHOUGH NO SUCH TROUBLE HAS BEEN REPORTED). SOME OF OSMANI'S MEETINGS HAVE BEEN INTERRUPTED BY DISSIDENT ELEMENTS; OSMANI CLAIMS ZIA'S SUPPORTERS ARE ORGANIZING THE INTERRUPTIONS. GIVEN THE LOCAL HISTORY OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE, THE CAMPAIGN SO FAR HAS BEEN REMARKABLY PEACEFUL. ZIA'S
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LABOR PROBLEMS HAVE QUIETED DOWN. THE ELECTION COMMISSIONER HAS TOURED THE COUNTRY EXTENSIVELY TO OVERSEE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A PROPER AND IMPARTIAL ELECTION. MOST LOCAL OBSERVERS ARE PREDICTING AN EASY VICTORY FOR ZIA, BASING THEIR FORECASTS UPON THE VASTLY SUPERIOR ASSETS ENJOYED BY THE PRESIDENT. WE HAVE, HOWEVER, FOUND NO BASIS FOR ESTIMATING THE LOYALTIES OF LOCAL VOTE DE-

LIVERERS OR THE SENTIMENTS OF THE VOTERS THEMSELVES;
AND THEREFORE WE SEE NO BASIS FOR A PREDICTION OF THE
RESULT BASED UPON AN ANALYSIS OF PROBABLE VOTER BEHAVIOR.
END SUMMARY.

1. AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN MOVES ALONG THE BACK-STRETCH, IT IS BECOMING APPARENT THAT GENERAL OSMANI'S CAMPAIGN IS HAVING TROUBLE. THE DISSENSION REPORTED REFTEL BETWEEN OSMANI AND HIS AWAMI LEAGUE SUPPORTERS HAS CONTINUED AND HAS BEEN REPORTED ON THE FRONT PAGES OF THE DACCA DAILIES, MOST OF WHICH ARE MAKING LITTLE EFFORT OTHERWISE TO GIVE OSMANI EQUAL COVERAGE WITH PRESIDENT ZIA. OSMANI'S RALLIES IN THE PAST WEEK HAVE ALSO BEEN DISRUPTED SEVERAL TIMES BY YOUTHS CHANTING SLOGANS AND OTHERS GETTING UP TO LEAVE JUST AS OSMANI STARTS TO SPEAK. NO VIOLENCE AT THE MEETINGS HAS BEEN REPORTED, BUT ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION OSMANI WAS ANGERED AND REFUSED TO CONTINUE SPEAKING UNTIL PERSUADED BACK TO THE MICROPHONE BY THE OTHERS WITH HIM ON THE DAIS. GENERAL OSMANI, WE ARE TOLD PRIVATELY, ASSUMED ZIA WAS BEHIND THE TROUBLE. OSMANI REPORTEDLY TELEPHONED ZIA TO PROTEST SUCH TACTICS AND THREATENED TO WITHDRAW FROM THE CAMPAIGN. WE UNDERSTAND THAT ZIA WAS CONCILIATORY, DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE TROUBLE AND PROMISED TO LOOK INTO IT.

3. THE RHETORICAL SLASHES BY ZIA AT THE "KILLERS OF
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DEMOCRACY" AND "PLUNDERERS OF NATIONAL WEALTH" HAVE LESSENERD SOMEWHAT AS ZIA HIMSELF HAS BECOME MORE STATESMANLIKE IN HIS APPEALS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL UNITY. IN A SPEECH YESTERDAY (MAY 24) IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS CAPITAL OF RANGAMATI, ZIA DECLARED THAT "WE MUST HAVE TOLERANCE TO LET DEMOCRACY HAVE ITS FULL PLAY FOR THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE AND TO LEAD THE COUNTRY TOWARDS SPEEDY DEVELOPMENT." IF ZIA PERSONALLY HAS TAKEN A MORE MODERATE TONE, THE "POLITICAL" MEMBERS OF HIS COUNCIL OF ADVISORS HAVE CONTINUED THEIR INVECTIVE AGAINST THE AWAMI LEAGUE AND THE CORRUPTION OF THE FORMER "BAKSALITE" GOVERNMENT. OSMANI'S CAMP HAS JOINED THE MUDSLINGING, WARNING THAT ZIA IS WORKING WITH DANGEROUS ELEMENTS (I.E. THE MUSLIM LEAGUE) "WHO COLLABORATED WITH THE PAKISTAN ARMY DURING THE LIBERATION AND KILLED 30 LAKH PEOPLE IN THE NAME OF RELIGION AND WHO WERE NOW MAKING THEIR DESPERATE ATTEMPT...TO ACHIEVE THEIR COAL...OF COMMUNAL HATRED." OSMANI HAS ALSO TRIED TO EXPLOIT THE TENSIONS IN THE ARMY BETWEEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS AND REPATRIATES BY ACCUSING ZIA OF HARASSING AND JAILING MANY FREEDOM FIGHTERS WHILE ALLOWING "GOONDAS" TO BREAK UP PEACEFUL GOJ FRONT RALLIES.

3. DESPITE THE DISRUPTION OF SOME GOJ RALLIES, THE CAMPAIGN HAS SO FAR BEEN REMARKABLY FREE OF VIOLENCE. PUBLIC INTEREST CONTINUES TO BE ONLY MODERATE. IT IS SAID THAT OSMAN'S MEETING HAVE OCCASIONALLY BEEN LARGER AND MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THAN ZIA'S. PRIVATELY, ONE OF OSMAN'S PRINCIPAL ORGANIZERS HAS ADMITTED TO POLOFF THAT AT LEAST ANOTHER MONTH AND PREFERABLY TWO WOULD BE NECESSARY TO CONDUCT A PROPER CAMPAIGN. AS IT IS, OSMAN'S STRATEGY IS TO VISIT EACH OF THE NINETEEN DISTRICT TOWNS AND LET THE GRASSROOTS AWAMI LEAGUE WORKERS DO WHAT THEY CAN IN THE VILLAGES. ZIA ALSO HAS A PROBLEM GETTING TO THE VILLAGES BECAUSE OF RECENT RAINS, BUT HE HAS OFTEN BEEN TO VILLAGES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IN THE PAST TWO YEARS.

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4. FOR THE MOMENT, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH ZIA HAS BEEN ABLE TO DEFUSE THE ONE SERIOUS PROBLEM PLAGUING HIM RECENTLY, THE RESTLESSNESS OF PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS. BY TACTICAL CONCESSIONS ON WAGE SCALES (AND PERHAPS SOME TOUGH PRIVATE TALK), THE BDG HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE STRIKING BANK EMPLOYEES BACK TO WORK AND IN STOPPING THE GRUMBLING OF THE JOURNALISTS.

5. THE ELECTION COMMISSION IS MAKING A PUBLIC EFFORT TO INSURE A PEACEFUL AND FAIR ELECTION. ELECTION COMMISSIONER JUSTICE NURAL ISLAMIS TOURING THE DISTRICT TOWNS CHECKING THE POLLING PREPARATIONS AND EXHORTING THE SUB-DIVISIONAL OFFICERS AND OTHER LOCAL OFFICIALS TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE BALLOT BOXES.
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